

STATUETTE REPRESENTING BES PANTHEOS

Egyptian, 304-30 B.C.

Bronze

Height: 9.2 cm

Reference: 22835



This solid bronze statuette has a large cylindrical tenon under the base and a suspension ring in the back.

It represents a pantheistic god, whose very complex iconography is composed of symbols and attributes largely attested in Egyptian mythology: the head of the god Bes with the body of a young standing man, his left leg placed forward and his arms falling along the body; in the back, the tail of a hawk and a pair of spread wings with two additional arms attached on top of the wings; a headgear with a pair of sinuous ram horns, four feathers of Amon and a double uraeus; small heads of animals or deities encircling the head of Bes, serpents on the thighs and in the left hand placed forward; an oval base surrounded by a snake biting his tail, an ichneumon (on the right) and a scorpion near the feet.

Despite its miniature size, the statuette is finely made, with an accurate modeling of the child's body and many plastic or incised details for the monstrous head of Bes, for the wings, the hands or the headgear.

Bes Pantheos is a documented deity (although rather rare), both in figural arts (statuettes, small reliefs or stelae, etc.) and in Egyptian literature (see the illustrated magic papyrus of Brooklyn, dated to the 30th Dynasty).

As notified by S. Sauneron, pantheistic deities represent a single god (here the dwarf Bes, an apotropaic deity, guardian of young mothers and children), whose attributes and symbols are clearly indicated to the viewer: for the Egyptians of the 1st millennium B.C., the accumulation and juxtaposition of all these elements would strengthen the magical power of the god, on the principle that the divine omnipotence could oppose to misfortune and to the evil forces, and protect from their negative effects.

CONDITION

Complete and in good condition; end of the left wing lost, fragments reglued. Surface of dark brown color, partially covered with black and green patina.

PROVENANCE

Formerly R. Liechti Collection (1934-2010), Geneva, Switzerland, assembled between the 1950s-1990s; acquired on the Swiss art market (Lausanne) in 1977.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ETIENNE M., *Héka, Magie et envoûtement dans l'Égypte ancienne*, Paris, 2000, pp. 54 ff.

KAKOSY L., A propos des statues guérisseuses et d'une statue de Bès au Musée du Louvre, in KOENIG Y. (ed.), *La magie en Égypte : à la recherche d'une définition*, Paris, 2000, pp. 273 ff.

Reflets du divin, *Antiquités pharaoniques et classiques d'une collection privée*, Geneva, 2001, pp. 118-119, no. 110.

On Bes Pantheos, see:

SAUNERON S., *Le papyrus magique illustré de Brooklyn*, New York, 1970, pp. 12 ff.